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Indigenous issues

Status of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations

Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Summary

The present report on the status of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 40/131. It indicates the activities undertaken with the resources of the Fund and shows income and expenditure as well as the pledges and payments made to the Fund. In addition, it updates the information contained in the previous biennial report (A/61/376) and reports on the twentieth and twenty-first sessions of the Board of Trustees, held in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

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I. Mandate of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations

1. The General Assembly, by its resolution 40/131, established the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. The purpose of the Fund is to assist representatives of indigenous communities and organizations in participating in the deliberations of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations of the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights by providing them with financial assistance, funded by means of voluntary contributions from Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities.

2. By its resolution 50/156, the General Assembly extended the mandate of the Fund by deciding that the Fund should also be used to assist representatives of indigenous communities and organizations in participating in the deliberations of the open-ended intersessional working group of the Commission on Human Rights charged with elaborating a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, established by the Commission in its resolution 1995/32 and endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in its resolution 1995/32.

3. The General Assembly further extended the mandate of the Fund in its resolution 56/140 by deciding that the Fund should be used to assist representatives of indigenous communities and organizations in attending, as observers, the sessions of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

4. Until 2006, the Fund assisted indigenous representatives in attending the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the working group of the Commission on Human Rights charged with elaborating a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. With the conclusion of the work on the Declaration and its adoption by the General Assembly on 13 September 2007, the working group of the Commission on Human Rights charged with elaborating a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples was terminated. The Working Group on Indigenous Populations held its last session in 2006 and was replaced by the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as part of the institution-building around the Human Rights Council. The Expert Mechanism will hold its first session in October 2008.

II. Administration and Board of Trustees

5. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 40/131, the Fund is administered by the Secretary-General, in accordance with the relevant financial rules and regulations of the United Nations on general trust funds for humanitarian assistance and with the advice of a Board of Trustees. The recommendations of the Board are approved by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on behalf of the Secretary-General. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights acts as the secretariat of the Fund and the Board of Trustees.

6. The Board of Trustees is composed of five persons with relevant experience in issues affecting indigenous populations, who serve in their personal capacity as United Nations experts. The Board members are appointed by the Secretary-General for a three-year renewable term.

7. The five members appointed for the term ending on 31 December 2008 are themselves indigenous representatives: Nadir Bekirov (Ukraine); Jannie Lasimbang (Malaysia); Lars Anders Baer (Sweden); Ahmed Mahiou (Algeria); and Tarcila Rivera Zea (Peru).

III. Grant cycle

A. Admissibility of new applications and selection process

8. Applications for travel grants to attend the 2009 sessions of the Expert Mechanism and the Permanent Forum must be submitted by the established deadline of 1 October 2008 to allow for analysis by the secretariat of the Fund and the Board of Trustees. Admissible applications will be examined by the Board at its next session, in 2009.

9. During the period between the receipt of the application and the next session of the Board, the secretariat of the Fund decides on the admissibility of applications on the basis of the mandate of the Fund.

10. Admissible application forms are verified by the secretariat of the Fund as to their conformity with approved selection criteria and additional information is requested from the organization, if necessary. Reference organizations and specialized networks are also consulted, if needed. The complete application form is then summarized and analysed by the secretariat in accordance with the selection criteria in chart form to facilitate the work of the Board.

11. At its annual session, the Board reviews all applications declared admissible, including the original application form, the analysis chart prepared by the secretariat and any other relevant information. It then makes recommendations to the Secretary-General in accordance with the criteria of the Fund.

12. After the session, the secretariat reviews all the recommendations of the Board for consistency with relevant United Nations administrative and financial rules and regulations. The High Commissioner for Human Rights approves, on behalf of the Secretary-General, the recommendations that are acceptable as well as new best practices identified during the annual session of the Board.

13. Approved travel grants include a round-trip air ticket in economy class via the most direct route from the beneficiary's home town to Geneva or New York, which each beneficiary receives in his or her local travel agency, and a daily subsistence allowance for the days of the session, which he or she receives upon arrival in Geneva or New York.

B. Monitoring and evaluation by the Board of Trustees and the secretariat

14. Recipients of travel grants are closely monitored before and during the sessions of the working groups and the Permanent Forum. They will also be monitored during sessions of the Expert Mechanism. Moreover, beneficiaries are requested to provide a copy of any statement delivered as part of their reporting obligations and to complete questionnaires on their participation and follow-up

activities upon return to their home countries. The secretariat of the Fund maintains a daily attendance sheet of the grantees.

15. At its annual session, the Board of Trustees reviews the status of all travel grants allocated in previous years, as well as the reports drafted by the secretariat analysing the questionnaires submitted by beneficiaries on their participation and follow-up activities.

16. The Chairperson, or another Board member, as well as a representative of the secretariat attend the sessions of the working groups, the Expert Mechanism and the Permanent Forum in order to meet with all beneficiaries present and to assess the impact of their participation on the deliberations of the sessions.

IV. Twentieth and twenty-first sessions of the Board of Trustees

17. The Board of Trustees held its twentieth session from 26 February to 2 March 2007 (10 meetings) and its twenty-first session from 4 to 8 February 2008 (10 meetings).

18. The Board examined information prepared by its secretariat concerning the financial situation of the Fund; new contributions paid and pledges made by Governments since the nineteenth session; applications for new travel grants to attend the sessions of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. The Board also met with representatives of donor Governments during its annual meetings with donors.

19. Grant recommendations made by the Board at its twentieth and twenty-first sessions were approved by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, on behalf of the Secretary-General, on 4 April 2007 and 15 February 2008, respectively.

A. Implementation of recommendations

20. The Board noted with satisfaction that all recommendations adopted at its nineteenth session and twentieth session had been implemented by its secretariat.

B. Financial situation of the Fund

21. The table below indicates the contributions received for the attribution of grants at the twentieth and twenty-first sessions of the Board of Trustees:

(United States dollars)

State, non-governmental organization or individual	*Twentieth session*	*Twenty-first session*	*Date paid*[a]
Algeria	5 000		December 2005
		5 000	January 2007
Australia		20 430	May 2007
Canada	24 699		March 2006
Chile	1 000		July 2006
Cyprus		3 418	March 2007
Denmark	53 004		January 2007
		52 910	January 2008
Estonia	16 841		December 2006
		26 229	August 2007
Finland	33 801		July 2006
		36 935	August 2007
France	131 752		December 2006
		129 701	February 2007
Guatemala		5 000	October 2007
Holy See	2 000		August 2006
Norway	49 100		June 2006
Spain	51 015		January 2006
	63 774		October 2006
		67 204	June 2007
Sweden		6 870	January 2007
Switzerland		178 571	December 2007
Turkey		10 000	December 2007
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	10 000		January 2007
Yorio Shiokawa — Japanese Workers' Committee for Human Rights	379		March 2006
Total	**442 365**	**537 269**	

[a] According to official receipt vouchers available at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

C. Consideration of new applications and recommendations for grants at the twentieth session

22. The Board considered 229 admissible applications for grants and recommended 60 travel grants for indigenous representatives to attend the twenty-fifth session of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, for a total amount of approximately $172,461. Owing to the abolition of the Commission on Human Rights, the Working Group on Indigenous Populations did not meet. All travel grants were consequently cancelled and reallocated during the twenty-first session of the Board.

23. In addition, the Board considered 288 admissible applications and recommended 67 travel grants for indigenous representatives to attend the sixth session of the Permanent Forum, held in New York from 14 to 25 May 2007, for a total amount of approximately $305,992.

	Working Group on Indigenous Populations		*Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*	
Geographical area[a]	*Number of applicants*	*Number of beneficiaries*	*Number of applicants*	*Number of beneficiaries*
Africa	82	19	99	20
Americas	58	17	86	20
Asia and the Pacific	69	18	83	22
Europe and the Arctic	20	6	20	5
Total	**229**	**60**	**288**	**67**

[a] The geographical distribution reflects the applications received and not necessarily the geographical distribution as used by the United Nations Secretariat and United Nations legislative bodies.

D. Consideration of new applications and recommendations for grants at the twenty-first session

24. The Board considered 154 admissible applications and recommended 78 travel grants for indigenous representatives to attend the first session of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which will take place in Geneva from 1 to 3 October 2008, for a total amount of approximately $209,066.

25. In addition, the Board considered 303 admissible applications and recommended 78 grants for indigenous representatives to attend the seventh session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which took place in New York from 21 April to 2 May 2008, for a total amount of approximately $357,199.

	Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples		*Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues*	
Geographical area[a]	*Number of applicants*	*Number of beneficiaries*	*Number of applicants*	*Number of beneficiaries*
Africa	59	25	104	22
Americas	27	22	62	18
Asia and the Pacific	57	22	116	33
Europe and the Arctic	11	9	21	5
Total	**154**	**78**	**303**	**78**

[a] The geographical distribution reflects the applications received and not necessarily the geographical distribution as used by the United Nations Secretariat and United Nations legislative bodies.

E. Other recommendations adopted by the Board of Trustees

1. Trust Fund database

26. The Board recommended that the secretariat explore the possibility of developing a database containing relevant information on grants and beneficiaries, including information on their indigenous communities, the beneficiaries themselves and their respective organizations. The secretariat is currently preparing the database.

2. Dissemination of information on the Fund

27. The Board members emphasized the need to actively distribute the Fund's application forms as widely as possible, in particular in regions and countries which in the past had been underrepresented at sessions of the working groups and the Permanent Forum. The secretariat has distributed the Fund's application forms through various channels to indigenous communities and organizations located in underrepresented countries.

3. Future direction of the Fund

28. The members highlighted the fundamental importance of the Fund and the Board as an independent United Nations body that provided direct assistance to indigenous peoples and allowed them to participate in United Nations meetings of vital importance for them.

29. The Board members noted with satisfaction that the Fund and the Board were used as a model for the establishment of various other funds within and outside the United Nations system, including a voluntary fund to allow beneficiaries of travel grants to attend meetings of the Ad Hoc Open-ended Intersessional Working Group on Article 8 (j) and Related Provisions of the Convention on Biological Diversity, which had become operational in 2007, as well as a fund to provide travel grants to attend meetings of the Intergovernmental Committee on Intellectual Property and Genetic Resources, Traditional Knowledge and Folklore, established by the World Intellectual Property Organization, which had also become operational in 2007. The Board underlined the need to work in cooperation with the two funds so as to support the participation of indigenous peoples in international meetings.

30. The Board welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly in its resolution 61/295 of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and expressed its deep appreciation to the 130 Fund beneficiaries that had actively participated in sessions of the working group on the draft declaration from 1995 to 2005. The Board thanked the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights for its efforts to diffuse and implement the Declaration.

4. Cost plan for 2009

31. The Board revised and approved the cost plan of the Fund for 2009, with envisaged expenditure amounting to $868,560.

F. Fund-raising

32. The Board held its meeting with donors during its twenty-first session. Representatives of Bolivia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Haiti, the Holy See, the Russian Federation, Spain, Malaysia, Mexico, the Philippines, Turkey, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and the European Commission attended. The Board expressed its appreciation for the donors' contributions to the Fund and their pledges.

33. Board members recommended sending a letter to donors in September 2008 appealing for additional contributions to be paid before its next session in order to allow it to increase further the number of grants and the representation of indigenous communities and organizations in 2009.

V. Implementation of decisions concerning travel grants

34. The secretariat of the Fund reports to the Board of Trustees at each annual session on the implementation of decisions made at its previous session and approved by the High Commissioner for Human Rights on behalf of the Secretary-General. The Board reviews the implementation of those decisions and the secretariat reports on their implementation biennially to the General Assembly.

VI. Trends over the period 2007-2008

A. Number of applications received to attend the sessions of the working groups, the Expert Mechanism and the Permanent Forum

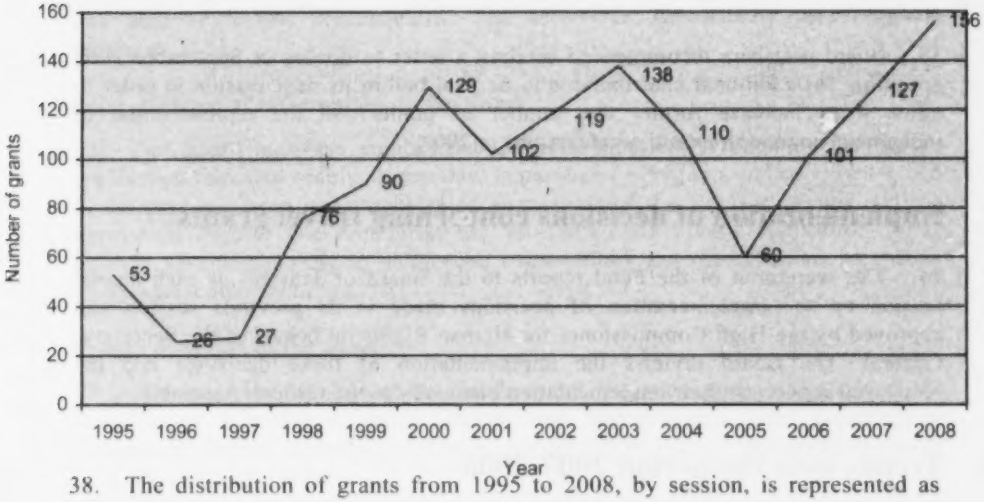
35. The table below shows a substantial increase in the number of admissible applications from 1997 (52) to 2008 (457).

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2003*	*2004*	*2005*	*2006*	*2007*	*2008*
Working Group on Indigenous Populations	47	72	220	119	225	232	233	266	193	177	229	—
Working group charged with elaborating a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples	5	3	20	36	32	27	23	35	15	15	—	—
Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues	—	—	—	—	—	323	206	246	256	203	288	303
Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Populations	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	154
Total	**52**	**75**	**240**	**155**	**257**	**582**	**462**	**547**	**464**	**395**	**517**	**457**

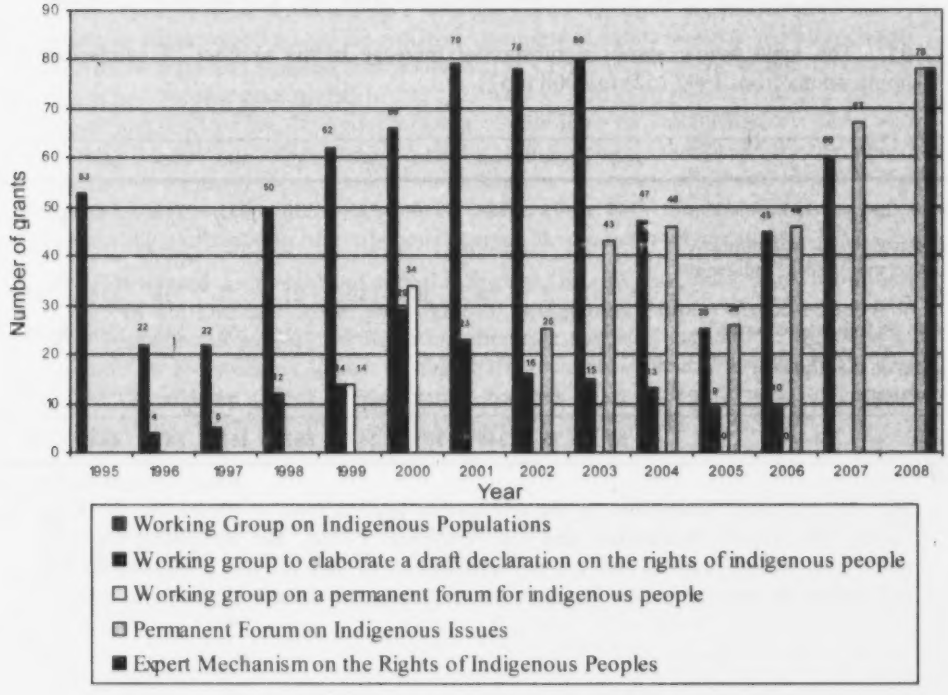
36. Every year, in addition to the admissible applications to attend the Working Group, the Expert Mechanism and the Permanent Forum, the secretariat receives more than 50 applications that are not admissible, as they are not complete, do not fall within the mandate of the Fund, or are received after the established deadline.

B. Annual allocation of travel grants

37. In 2008 the secretariat received a total of 457 admissible applications to attend the sessions of the Expert Mechanism and the Permanent Forum. With the resources available, it was able to allocate 156 travel grants. From 1995 to 2008, the Fund allocated grants as illustrated in the figure below:



38. The distribution of grants from 1995 to 2008, by session, is represented as follows:



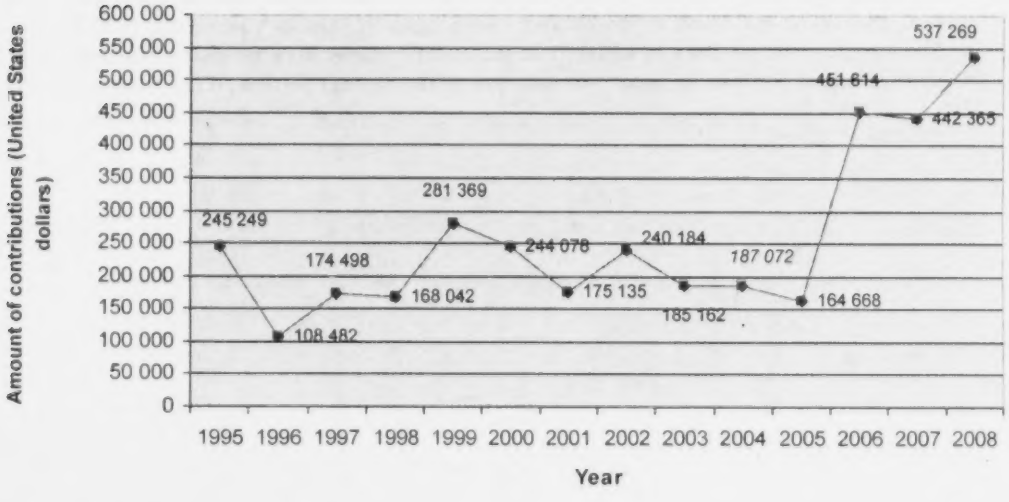
C. Contributions received by the Fund

39. The Board can allocate travel grants on the basis of the contributions paid and duly registered by the United Nations Treasurer, as well as any balance remaining from previous years, as established by the United Nations Office at Geneva.

40. Since the creation of the Fund in 1985, its mandate has been expanded three times in response to developments and the changing realities of the United Nations system and indigenous peoples. The Board and the secretariat have reacted immediately to those new challenges so as to enable indigenous peoples to benefit from each new mandate, with the support of donors. Over the years, the General Assembly and the regular donors to the Fund have viewed the Fund as an important tool in providing assistance to indigenous peoples and have recognized the accomplishments of its Board of Trustees in carrying out this task.

41. When the mandate of the Fund is extended, applications received from indigenous organizations and communities increase, therefore the amount of contributions also needs to increase so as to respond to the demands.

42. The following figure shows the trend in contributions from 1995 to 2008:



D. Annual expenditure

43. In accordance with its mandate, the only expenditures encumbered annually under the Fund are travel grants for indigenous representatives to attend the sessions of the Working Group, the Expert Mechanism and the Permanent Forum. About $30,000 is allocated every year for the organization of the session of the Board of Trustees in Geneva.

44. In addition, in accordance with the United Nations financial rules and regulations governing the general trust funds for humanitarian assistance, 13 per cent of the envisaged expenditure is set aside to cover programme support costs and 15 per cent for the operating cash reserve.

VII. How to contribute to the Fund

45. Governments, non-governmental organizations and other private or public entities can contribute to the Fund. Information on how to contribute can be obtained from the secretariat at: United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. Telephone: +(41) (22) 928 97 37; +(41) (22) 928 91 64; facsimile: +(41) (22) 928 90 66; e-mail: IndigenousFunds@ohchr.org.

VIII. Recommendations

46. **The Board of Trustees of the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations foresees the need to receive an additional $868,560 prior to the start of the twenty-second session of the Board, scheduled to be held from 2 to 6 February 2009, in order to be able to satisfy a sufficient number of new applicants envisaged for 2009 and to fulfil its mandate satisfactorily.**

47. **The Board of Trustees strongly encourages Governments that have not yet contributed to the Fund to do so and encourages donors to contribute to the Fund by the end of 2008 in order that the contributions may be duly recorded by the United Nations Treasurer in advance of the annual session of the Board.**